

**Testimony of Fernando Gonzalez
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Submitted to the Committee on Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and
International Relations
U.S. House of Representatives**

Security of Explosives Magazines

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The Fort Worth Fire Department Bomb Squad is currently responsible for the maintenance and security of four explosives magazines in the City of Fort Worth. Three of these magazines (one Type 2 and two Type 4) are located at our evidence storage facility and bomb range on the outskirts of Fort Worth. The Type 4 magazines (not pictured) contain only electric blasting caps and are kept in the fully alarmed evidence storage building. The Type 2 magazine (Exhibit A) is equipped with a motion detection alarm. The fourth; a Type 1 magazine, is located at our Fire and Police Training Center (Exhibit B). The Type 1 magazine is equipped with intrusion and motion detection. All alarms are monitored round-the-clock by our Fire Dispatch/Alarm Office.

We did not start with this level of protection.

On Sunday, April 14, 1991 a break-in occurred at our Type II explosive magazine and our evidence storage facility. Entry to the grounds was achieved by cutting a single lock at a gate. Indications were that the storage facility was breached using simple prying tools. Entry to the explosives magazine was attempted in several ways. A hole was cut in the side of the structure using an acetylene torch. Due to the sand barrier between inner and outer walls this was unsuccessful. A pry-bar was also used to create a viewing port through a roof opening, but allowed no access. Ultimately, access was gained by cutting through the padlocks with the torch and opening the door to the magazine.

Taken in the magazine burglary were approximately 86 pounds of high explosive in various configurations, 30 pounds of binary explosive, and 4000 feet of detonating cord.

Taken from the evidence storage facility were 10 pounds of smokeless powder, five gallons of ether, two portable magazines (Type 4) containing 100 blasting caps, a portable generator, and various tools and equipment.

The publicity caused by the break-in produced some quick leads but none proved conclusive. Three weeks after the theft, the explosives and the two portable magazines containing blasting caps were found abandoned on a farm-to-market road. The tools,

smokeless powder, generator, and ether were not recovered and the suspects were not identified.

In May of 1991, and as a result of this burglary, an alarm system was installed at both facilities that included both intrusion and motion detection.

One year later on Sunday May 17, 1992 another burglary occurred at the same facility. This time only the explosives storage magazine was burglarized. Evidence indicated that a grinder or other abrasive power tool was used to cut the hinges from the door to gain access. The loss was approximately 40 pounds of high explosive and five pounds of binary explosive. Leads were developed and approximately two months later two suspects were arrested and the missing explosives were recovered.

In response to this second burglary, an eight-foot perimeter fence with three levels of concertina or 'razor wire' was installed around the compound (Exhibit A). Reinforcements were added to the hinges and locks on the explosive magazine. Placards were placed on exterior entrances prohibiting entry.

As a result, we've had no further burglaries or attempts at any of our explosives magazines since 1992. I attribute this to several factors. The primary factor is the visible deterrent of the perimeter fencing and alarm panels. A secondary factor is the increased traffic to the facility. In Fort Worth we are fortunate to have an excellent working relationship with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. It's notable that they also store their explosives in the smaller Type 2 magazine visible in Exhibit A. This has essentially doubled patrols at this location.

As a bomb squad commander there are a few other security measures I would welcome at our facility that I think could be beneficial to other squads as well.

Video surveillance would be the ideal preventative measure for protecting these installations. Many bomb squad facilities I've visited, including our own, are in remote locations. These locations give bomb squads the ability to train effectively and with various types and amounts of explosives. Unfortunately, the necessity of having a remote location also protects a potential burglar from discovery when he or she trespasses on a facility. It's for this reason that I think video surveillance - as opposed to intrusion and motion alarms - is a better theft prevention measure. The time consuming aspect of an explosive theft is in breaching the magazine - not in loading the explosives.

Readily identifiable audible alarms (110-120 decibel range) would also provide a means of alerting individuals in the immediate area, as well as making a lengthy operation more difficult to complete.

On a second front, it would be beneficial to mandate BATF inspections of state and locally controlled explosives magazines. Detailed inventories and regular inspections would increase the odds of recovering stolen explosives through quick identification and

also mitigate various unsafe practices (e.g. storing blasting caps with high explosives, deteriorated military ordnance with high explosives, etc.)

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

EXHIBIT A

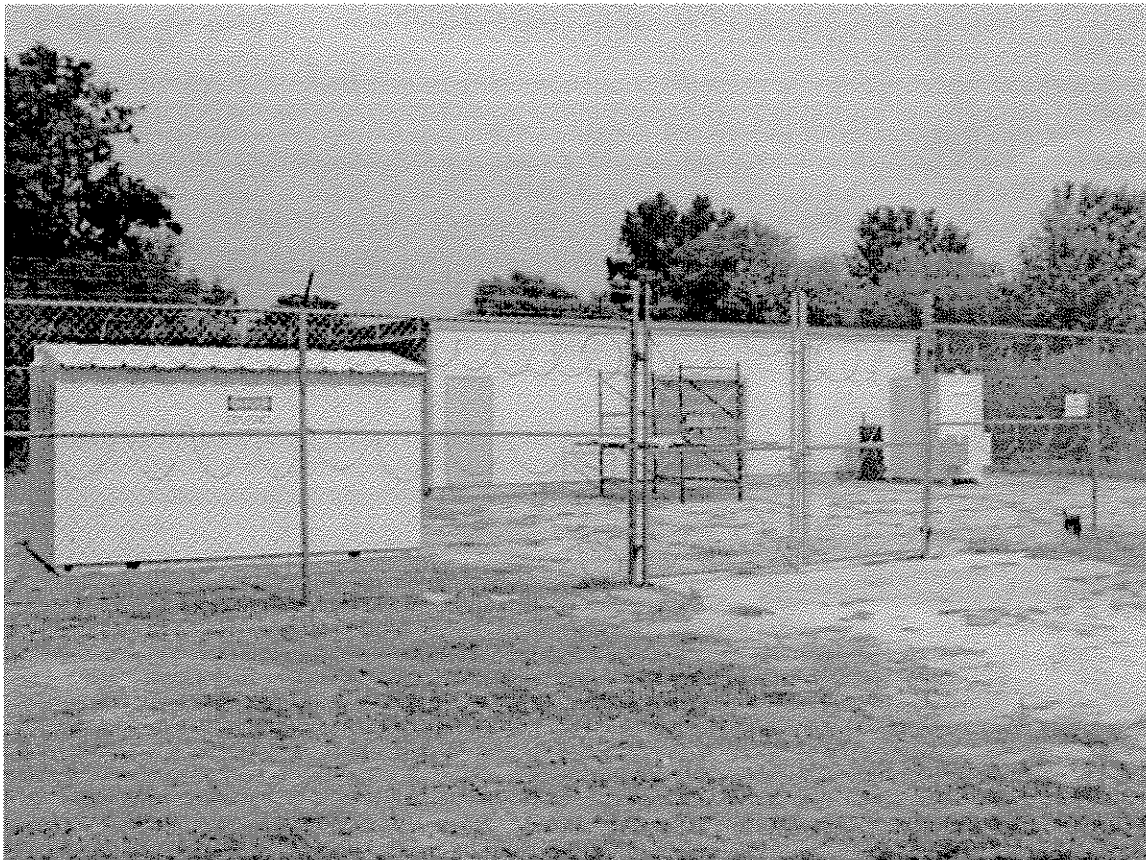


EXHIBIT B

